Section 2

Observations

2A

Social and Cultural Context

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND TRENDS

- Many people are connected to National Forests and play a significant role in how their landscapes evolve. *(See Connection between People and Forests)*
- There is a broad spectrum of people linked to the Forest and ideas about how these National Forests should be managed. People expect to be included and heard, but accommodating all interests and uses is difficult. *(See Public Participation in Forest Planning)*
- People recognize that the strength and quality of life of neighboring communities and this region are intimately tied to the health of Forest ecosystems. *(See Concern for Forest Resources)*
- While many values about these Forests are often held in common, desired outcomes and approaches often diverge. *(See Values Regarding Forests)*
- People's knowledge about these Forests draws from different sources and experiences. This shapes their perspective on how to manage the Forest. *(See Knowledge about Forests)*
- Interests in and uses on these Forests are shaped by global, national, and local trends. Changing lifestyles shape local communities as well as these Forests. *(See Changing Social and Cultural Demands)*
- As Forest uses change and expand, managing people has become one of the Forest Service's greatest challenges. *(See Managing People and Uses)*

OVERVIEW

People are a powerful force in shaping Forests and pose as many, if not more, management challenges than any biological or physical force. Social and cultural relationships to National Forests are more complex than any objective analysis alone can describe. Less tangible feelings and experiences often surpass the utilitarian connections often described in economic and user analyses. People's values and knowledge regarding Forests shape the way they relate to them. They also shape the way they use these lands and the way they think they should be managed, for themselves and for others.

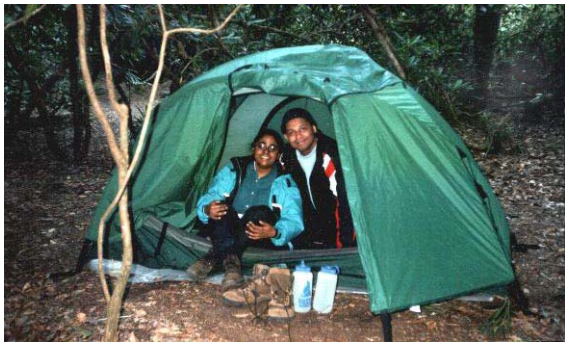
This assessment describes both tangible and intangible evidence of people's connections to the Forest. The scope of these social and cultural ties is vast. As National Forests are managed for the American public and are tied into a global environment, these ties stretch from local to national and even to global scales. This chapter describes the social and cultural context around these Forests and major trends that are changing this. In doing so, it sets the stage for the following chapters that describe more specific linkages to the Forest.

The information used to describe the social and cultural context was collected from published information in addition to personal statements of people involved in this assessment. Demographic and economic information at local, state, and national level was reviewed along with local planning documents. Input from county workshops and Forest Service public meetings as well as project team meetings were also used to add personal perspectives.

FINDINGS

1. Connection between People and Forests

There is no doubt that Forests have helped shape societies and cultures that surround them. People receive many tangible and intangible benefits from Forests and many people, communities and groups care about them. Forests and other natural places play a vibrant role in the hearts and minds of people. These sentiments and attachments are a part of their social and cultural values. Many places on the Forest have specific purposes and meaning to people, and shape their economies, beliefs, and traditions.



Many people are connected to National Forests and play a significant role in how their landscapes evolve.

In the communities immediately surrounding these three Forests, rural lifestyles, historic landscapes, and cultural traditions related to the Forests are an important component of their quality of life. The multiple ways that rural and tribal communities near Forests are connected strengthen these ties. At a broader scale, numerous people in the region also claim these Forests are an important part of their quality of life and their overall concern for the environment and lifestyle of this region. These connections can also be indirect. Many different people care about forests around the world and have an interest in their health and preservation whether or not they ever visit them or know them personally.

Just as Forests influence people, people have always been a part of Forests and have shaped

their current condition. Forests continuously evolve as they are affected by the decisions people make about their vegetation, wildlife, soils, and water supplies. For example, American Indians planted corn on the edge of forested lands to draw out deer and game to hunt, and then burned these fields to keep them fertile and to control insects. Similarly, the establishment of the Forest Service had its own effects as new controls changed how people used National Forests. New management techniques they implemented, like rigorous fire suppression, altered natural processes. Even today, many people in this assessment recognized that Forest Service action or inaction is one of the biggest influences on these natural systems.

For these reasons and more, people are as important as the consideration of biological and physical realms in Forest planning. Each linkage in this assessment (Economic, Planning, Tribal, Use, Interests) is a distinct way in which people are tied to these Forests. This assessment is intended to help the Forest Service and other users and stakeholders, see how people fit as a part of the picture.

2. Public Participation in Forest Planning and Management

With a broad spectrum of people linked to National Forests, ideas about managing them vary tremendously. The Forest Service invites public participation to better understand these ideas. The public expects that their needs will be heard and included, but accommodating their diverse interests and uses is difficult. Further, it is hard to translate the broad ideas or concerns expressed at a Forest planning level to specific locations or actions.

There is a broad spectrum of people linked to the Forest and ideas about how these National Forests should be managed. People expect to be included and heard, but accommodating all interests and uses is difficult.

Historically, public involvement focused on gathering input for the Forest Service to then translate into alternatives and a decision. This Forest plan revision went beyond input. In this process, collaborative-style meetings were used to bring different parties together not only to share their views, but also to discuss desired conditions to include in alternatives and potential solutions together. These collaborative meetings garnered an overwhelmingly positive response from participants for involving them in a meaningful way. Public involvement in planning is further discussed in *Section 2D—Decision-Making Linkages* and *Appendix A8—Local Examples of Collaborative Planning.*

Many people, both inside and outside the Forest Service, express frustration that plans frequently don't turn to action. Many people complain that these Forests are not managed up to their standards or even up to the stated goals of Forest plans. Most people recognize that these goals can't be met within the budget and staff constraints of the Forest Service. Many people also express a willingness to become more involved in Forest management in order to reach these goals. This is evident in the growing number of volunteer projects and stewardship partnerships on National Forests.

The people responsible for implementing projects are often disconnected from the decisions that set the actions in motion. Many participants in the collaborative workshops expressed

interest in continuing their stewardship and responsibility into implementing the plans. This would place more responsibility back onto all parties that helped to shape the decision, not just the Forest Service. These collaborative and partnership approaches are discussed further in *Section 3B—Recommendations.*

3. Concern for Forest Resources

National Forests in Utah contain a large supply of valuable resources that are critical to local communities and to larger ecosystems. Thus, managing and allocating resources is a constant concern. The Forest Service's "multiple-use, sustained yield" philosophy captures the need to balance present needs with future needs, conservation with preservation, and human desires with natural realities. The multiple-use, sustained yield philosophy is often affirmed by local communities in support of continuing important uses on the Forest. Local communities also state that they know the strength and quality of life of their communities are intimately tied to the health of forest ecosystems. While many residents support resource extraction and traditional industries as essential to supporting their lifestyles, they wish to do so without impairing the land and their livelihoods.

They acknowledge that resources are limited, but if properly managed, the Forest can be a continuous source of economic opportunity. The multiple-use, sustained yield philosophy is also supported by preservation-minded groups who emphasize the need for sustainability. Many groups interested in these Forests are keenly interested in promoting the sustainability of the entire ecosystem—including native flora and fauna, water and soils, and people as a force within the system.

People recognize that the strength and quality of life of neighboring communities and this region are intimately tied to the health of Forest ecosystems.

There is substantial debate over what constitutes a 'healthy forest' and how it should be managed to reach this goal. Philosophies about actively managing the Forest or letting nature 'take its course' frequently diverge. The role of fire, insect infestations, and predator wildlife species in forest health are frequently debated. The appropriate balance and composition of different plant and wildlife species also varies, depending on which species is of primary concern.

Water is another primary concern and is a mater of survival in this region. Water supply is clearly limited and competition for it is continuously growing. People, plants, and wildlife all affect the availability of water for one another. Many current forest health issues, such as insect infestation, fire hazards, the short supply of browse forage, and plant and animal populations can be traced back to water—particularly the ongoing drought conditions. Neighboring communities also depend on this water and emphasize that managing watersheds for water quantity and quality is a primary concern. Many local residents support vegetation management as a tool for raising water yields, but there is scientific disagreement on its effectiveness.

Numerous intangible qualities of Forests are also seen as resources. Qualities such as beauty, solitude, quiet, memories and the raw force of nature enhance people's experience. These are important components of the Forest's role in personal retreat, spiritual renewal, family

gatherings, and adventure. For many people, these qualities are among their highest concerns, but are among the most difficult to define or manage. These qualities are very subjectively defined by different people and are also very vulnerable to impact by other people.

4. Values Regarding Forests

People recognize that Forests have social, economic, and environmental value. While many values toward Forests, such as protecting forest health and involving people as stewards of the land are held in common, how people prioritize these values differs. People can be roughly divided by three priorities: social, economic, and environmental. Within these, people also value both tangible and intangible qualities of these Forests—such as services and resources (tangible), and experiences and impressions (intangibles).

A primary difference of perspectives hinges on the degree to which people are valued as contributors to or beneficiaries of the Forest. At one end of the spectrum are groups who feel that people should be an integral and primary part of these Forests—managing and benefiting from it as people see fit. Many local residents who have used the land for years share this perspective. They frequently believe good stewardship is supported by actively managing the land and that economic prosperity can be tied to this. At the other end of the spectrum are groups who feel people should be only one part of the system, allowing the environment to play a lead role. These groups frequently support minimizing human activities and consumption. They also commonly believe that management should be used primarily to balance human impacts on the environment and restore natural systems.

While many values about these Forests are often held in common, desired outcomes and approaches often diverge

Perspectives and motivations can also be divided along the lines of active versus passive management, commodity (economic) versus amenity (intrinsic) value, self-interest versus public interest, or traditional versus new uses. Perspectives are also often divided into local versus non-local, but making this distinction is not always accurate because local residents do not always share the same views, especially as the mix of people in communities near these Forests shifts.

5. Knowledge about Forests

People gain their understanding of Forests in different ways. First-hand experience, scientific research, written reports and articles, or stories are all valid ways to learn. The way in which people acquire their knowledge shapes the way they understand or value Forests. Not surprisingly, different interests often disagree over which source, research or report accurately portrays the situation. Opposing groups often believe that other perspectives regarding Forest management lack the same degree of experience or depth behind it. Portraying and managing perceptions is as important as presenting the hard data.

Local communities and American Indian tribes draw much of their knowledge and values

about the Forest from first-hand experience, sometimes over generations. They often have extensive knowledge about the local landscape and trust their own knowledge of plants and wildlife and their management. These individuals view this knowledge as valuable for Forest planning and stewardship but they perceive that it is not always trusted or respected.

Many other Forest stakeholders, such as recreationists or environmental advocates, have more specialized interests and understanding of these Forests. These groups typically have less on-the-ground knowledge and are more aware of the issues they are occupied with than in different issues and interests of a given Forest. They often rely more on second-hand information or scientific knowledge than on personal experience to better understand the issues they care about.

People's knowledge about the forest draws from different sources and experiences, and this affects their perspective on how to manage the forest.

Disagreements over what goals are most important (values) and on how to achieve them (driven by knowledge) are the heart of many conflicts over managing these Forests. Fortunately, there is still substantial agreement in the middle. Still, finding solutions to satisfy a diversity of stakeholders will require personal interaction and qualitative problem-solving as much as scientific study. Further discussion of these different perspectives can be found in *Section 2F—Interest Linkages.*

6. Changing Social and Cultural Demands

a. National Trends

Greater mobility and communication advancements have opened new economic opportunities and influence where people live, work, and vacation today. Economies have grown regional and global in scale, led by large cities such as Salt Lake City and Las Vegas. These business trends have reduced local self-sufficiency in communities of all sizes. In many cases, these trends have also reduced or eliminated many primary production industries, such as agriculture and mining, thus reducing the vitality of the lifestyles they support as well.

Quality of life is a strong force in population patterns and economic growth across the country. Outdoor recreation and public lands are increasingly important and have made the western United States and parts of southern Utah attractive destinations for relocation and retirement. Ethnic diversity is also on the rise, especially in cities and resort areas. This growing and changing population is increasing the demands on public lands. Many newcomers to these areas have different backgrounds and knowledge than traditional users, creating new management challenges to balance different interests and uses. A list of these trends is included in *Appendix A3—Trends Affecting Forest Management in the West*.

With such changes, the role of the Forest has evolved over the past century. Many of the

traditional uses of the Forest, for which it was established, are economically or subsistence-based and locally-oriented, including grazing, timber, minerals, hunting, fishing and water resources. To this mix, new uses and concerns have been introduced that often extend beyond Forest boundaries—including recreation, tourism, and environmental preservation. Nationally, recreation visitors—such as campers, fishermen, and sightseers—now make up more than 78% of the National Forests' contribution to the overall economy. Logging on the other hand has decreased to just 12% (*source: USDA, 2000*). Public sentiment and concern for the environment is on the rise across the country and around the globe. National Forests are seen as a critical link in protecting the environmental quality all people deserve. There is also a rising expectation in the American public that businesses that utilize public resources do not do so at public expense or detriment of the public good. Scrutiny of how businesses operate on public lands has risen.

Interests in and uses on these Forests are shaped by global, national, and local trends. Changing lifestyles shape local communities as well as these Forests.

Federal mandates for National Forest lands are regularly adopted in response to these trends. According to Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth, national priorities for the Forest Service at beginning of the 21st century include: fire and fuels, invasive species, loss of open space, and unmanaged outdoor recreation. These are also locally identified priorities, and they will undoubtedly be emphasized in current Forest Service planning efforts. These mandates have a significant influence on local management decisions and funding priorities.

b. Local Trends

The land base of the study area is predominately rural landscapes and small communities. But in terms of population and demographics, the study area is a mix of urban and rural. While completely rural thirty years ago, more than half of the population of the eighteen counties studied now resides in or near urbanized areas such as Cedar City and St. George. This echoes statewide figures that show 85% of Utah's total population now lives in urban areas.

While not every community near these Forests is growing, they are all experiencing many population changes. Many people who were in traditional industries have experienced periods of unemployment or lowered wages or have left those industries and locations for other work. Many seasonal residents and employees have moved-in to work in the agriculture and recreation/tourism industries. Many other new residents are either retired or employed in the "footloose" technology sector that doesn't tie employees down to a location. Meanwhile, many young people have left rural communities for higher education opportunities and eventually move to urban areas in search of jobs that can support a family. This has shifted much of the young adult and school age population from rural to urban areas.

Like much of the nation, Utah is transitioning away from a resource-based economy, such as mining and agriculture, toward an information- and service-based economy, such as computers and tourism. Jobs in farming, mining, and timber have often been lost or

surpassed by the growing trade and services sectors. Some of these changes have intensified as the regulations and processes to develop resources have become more complicated and contested. They have been further affected by more competition leading to falling wages and profits in these sectors. Economic trends are discussed more extensively in *Section 2B—Economic Linkages*.

Many communities not only experience the economic impact of these losses, but also sense an erosion of traditional lifestyles and cultures that accompanied these jobs. These trends are reflected in the community itself. Real estate markets are changing. In some places, existing housing is often stagnating while second-home construction and ownership is growing. In others, a lack of affordable housing is driving away workers in lower-paying jobs. Municipal governments and school districts are struggling to provide services as a shrinking workforce and seasonal residents lower their tax base. School closings have become common in recent years and are diminishing the strength of many communities and their ability to attract new residents.

Community identity and continuity is further diminished by new residents arriving to fill new and different jobs. New job sectors and the appeal of recreation and tourism are attracting a more urban population to the area. This population growth necessitates more associated services such as retail, medical, and construction, further changing the employment mix. New residents often have different expectations for these Forests and for their community than long-term residents. This has led to struggles over directing the future of communities. The desires of new residents and visitors might not be well-represented in current local government or plans, and are also frequently missing from data statistics used to help guide plans and direct funding.

These trends are changing communities. Many rural residents who have lived and functioned in the traditional economic setting for generations are sometimes slow to adapt to the new economic realities and trends. Rural communities often have an uneasy sense that their culture and traditional way of life is at risk of being lost. They focus a lot of energy on safeguarding and defending their traditional social values as well as traditional economic activities.

Communities in this study area stated they would like to maintain resource-based industries as a part of their economies and culture even as they adapt to new trends. Local communities welcome economic growth, but still wish to preserve their rural lifestyle and culture. Many residents point out the low and seasonal wages of the hospitality industry and are reluctant to build tourism and recreation economies. However, economic development specialists in this region point out that tourism and recreation can be built strategically, to promote the preservation of traditional lifestyles and landscapes as a part of attracting visitors.

c. Recreation & Tourism Trends

Recreation and tourism are leading many changes in this region. They are shaping population migration and also changing demands on National Forests. Many of the newer and faster-growing uses on these Forests are recreational, including: family gatherings, relaxing, scenic drives, ATV riding, 4-wheeling, motorcycling, snowmobiling, bicycling, camping, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, rock climbing, snow sports, visiting historic sites and ruins, wildlife viewing, and nature study. These uses have begun to compete with more

traditional uses for the same resources. New users often have different expectations about their experience and how resources are managed.

These three Forests receive the majority of their use and visitation from the same communities they are tied to economically— Fishlake National Forest from central Utah, Manti Division of Manti La Sal National Forest from central Utah and the Wasatch Front, La Sal Division of Manti La Sal National Forest from southeastern Utah and Colorado, and Dixie National Forest from southwestern Utah and Las Vegas. The geographic draw to these Forests has expanded in recent years. As visitation increases in "local spots," many residents are recreating further away to escape the crowds. These changes in Forest use and visitation have created new management challenges. The Forest Service recently undertook the *National Visitor Use Monitoring Project (NVUMP)* in order to better understand the behaviors and preferences of people using National Forests across the country. These three Forests are at various stages of completing their projects, but the results should be helpful for better understanding visitor profiles and habits.

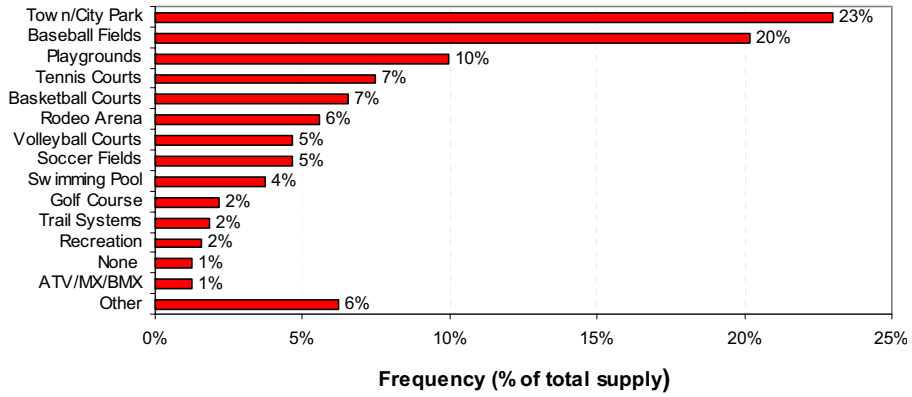
The Utah Division of Parks & Recreation recently completed a similar assessment of use and visitation to public parks around the state, called the *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. This plan notes that,

> "tourism activity is expected to remain strong and be an important source of growth for the State. Tourist activity has experienced a slight deceleration in recent years—similar to the deceleration for the economy as a whole" (Source: *SCORP*, 40).

As part of this plan, a *Statewide Recreation Needs Inventory Survey* was conducted to determine the needs of recreation infrastructure and programs in Utah. This survey highlights several important trends in rural Utah related to recreation, which are shown in *Figure 2A-1*. Of particular note is that less than 3% of rural residents considered "trail systems" or "ATV / MX / BMX" items to be provided. Town or city parks and baseball fields were the most common items supplied in rural areas (43%). (Source: *SCORP*, 99).

While recreation and tourism offer considerable economic development opportunities, they are not without their challenges. As communities promote their natural assets for these activities, they face the challenge of protecting the very resource that has provided

Figure 2A-1: **SCORP - Rural Receation Infrastructure**



Source: "State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan," Utah Division of Parks & Recreaton, 2003.

this opportunity. New technologies such as cell phones, GPS (Global Positioning Units), motorized recreation also have encouraged travel further into remote areas. Damage from inappropriate or illegal use is on the rise. New motorized uses, particularly ATVs are becoming a major concern. New activities, with different impacts and demands, are making recreation more difficult to manage overall. The rapid pace of these changes makes it difficult to plan for coming trends. Planning is also hampered by the difficulty of monitoring and evaluating when many of these uses are dispersed, do not require a permit, and data about them is sparse. Qualities such as solitude, beauty and open trails that attract people and add value to their experience can easily disappear without careful management. In response, local communities and interest groups are emerging to promote good stewardship and economic development through these uses.

Recreation use is described in more detail in *2E—Use Linkages* and the recreation and tourism economy is more extensively discussed in *2B—Economic Linkages*.

7. Managing People and Uses

In the last thirty years, the role of the Forest Service has shifted from commodity management to amenity management. As use of the Forest has grown and changed, managing the competing uses and interests of people has become a primary task of the Forest Service. Managing uses is one of the primary issues raised by the public in this Forest planning process. Inadequate management and illegal activities can jeopardize forest health, create user conflicts, and are expensive for Forests and local communities to remedy.

As Forest uses change and expand, managing people has become one of the Forest Service's greatest challenges.

While the management of traditional uses such as grazing and timber is well-established, the Forest Service struggles to accommodate and manage new and often conflicting uses. General-access uses, which don't require a permit, now constitute the majority of uses on all three Forests. This includes activities such as recreation and sightseeing. The Forest Service manages general-access uses through a variety of means, including Forest planning, rules and regulations, permits, and special designations that don't allow motorized or cross-county travel. The Forest Service also directs access to certain areas while diverting it from other areas by strategically placing infrastructure and controls such as road closures. Public education, interpretation and signage are also utilized to guide users.

As management of general-access uses is typically less direct and personal, it is often less effective. In some instances, the different knowledge and experience level of diverse users heightens this challenge causes problems. For example, visitors often don't know the purpose of grazing fences and gates or which areas are privately owned. Or, ATV riders sometimes can not tell if a trail is established or user-created. In other cases, the privileges are blatantly abused. Most stakeholders agreed that enforcement is lacking and that it is difficult to patrol

areas as large as these Forests. The effectiveness of particular management practices is also more difficult to assess because of their indirect nature and limited monitoring. Some information is available through recreational surveys, Forest Service staff observations, trailhead registers, and the *National Visitor Use Monitoring Project* survey. Still, none of these tools are currently used to the fullest extent. In addition, it is difficult to consider many of the uses concurrently because they are constantly changing.

Obvious shortcomings in managing these uses have spurred much public debate over how best to control general-access uses. Management preferences range from passive efforts to encourage responsible behavior to more aggressive tools to ensure people are thoroughly directed and held accountable for their actions. Many groups that are more distant from the day-to-day operations of the Forest often advocate access controls to limit uses and the potential for damaging impacts. Many well-established users believe access should not be an "all-or-nothing" choice, but a management tool for providing for different uses and levels of use. All stakeholders agreed that education is critical and supported a variety of programs, from *Leave no Trace* and *Tread Lightly* programs to environmental education and etiquette near private land.

Most local residents and active user groups want to keep areas open to a diversity of activities while reducing conflicts between users. Many of these groups prefer a positive approach to management, including education and better enforcement of existing regulations, rather than more regulations, permits, and fees. Many users suggested that there needs to be more incentive to self-police and enforce rules, and to use peer responsibility to make it socially unacceptable to break the rules. Users also stressed the importance of having responsible behaviors and activities clearly outlined in maps, signs, guides, and instructions for all to follow. Currently, this is not consistent or available everywhere. Permitting or licensing was suggested by the GOPB team as tools not only for managing and monitoring uses, but also for assigning more responsibility to user for their actions.

Funding would help manage uses better, but the source of funding is disputed. Visitors are often not charged directly for many of the services they receive, so fees were suggested, but with hesitancy. Local residents believe fees and permits often burden local users more than visitors because they visit more frequently. Others worry about putting a cost on something that is hard to quantify. Moreover, it is difficult to devise a fee system that fairly captures all the different uses.

The issue of access is discussed in more detail in *2C—Neighboring Land Linkages.* Uses and their management are covered more extensively *2E—Use Linkages* and in *Appendix A2—Linkages to Public Land Framework.*